

SUMMARY MINUTES

ISLAMORADA, VILLAGE OF ISLANDS PARKS & RECREATION CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, April 30, 2024

Meeting started at 4:03 p.m. at the Founders Park Community Center

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Alina Davis, Carolyn Wightman, Richard Russell, Christy Hughes, Natasha Early, David Epstein, John Weare, Shannon Cary, Joseph Jannach, Maria Bagiotti (IVOI), Anne Onsgard (IVOI), Alicia Mote (IVOI)

ABSENT:

Eduardo Suarez, Ted Benbow - Justified

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman asked John Weare to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Carolyn motioned to approve the minutes from January 10th. John seconded the motion, the motion passed unanimously (8-0)

EMERGENCY AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS: John requested that Jon Olsen's presentation be moved sooner so that he can return to his swim team practice at the pool. The Committee approved.

INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAM REPORT – JON OLSEN, HEAD SWIM COACH FKSC AND CORAL SHORES HIGH SCHOOL:

Jon stated that he has been the swim coach at Ron Levy Aquatic Center for 23 years. He was a competitive swimmer for 24 years and has been a coach for 28 years, for kids and adults. He coaches a year-round youth club swim team, the Florida Keys Youth Swim Club. The annual Jon Olsen Gold Medal Invitational Swim Meet was held at the pool this past weekend, with 280 swimmers from Monroe, Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties. The Florida Keys Youth Swim Club team consists of anywhere between 25 and 45 swimmers throughout the year. Jon also stated that he is the coach for the Coral Shores High School swim team and has 25 swimmers this year. He took 12 swimmers to the Regional Championships and 4 to the State Championships, and he mentioned that Coral Shores is the highest ranked public school in their division this year for swimming. His top groups on the team swim 8 times a week - three times in the mornings and every afternoon after school. Jon is setting up a new website to recruit new athletes for next year and will be running a Swim and Swim/Dive combination summer camp this summer. He mentioned that one of his swimmers, Abby Sargent, a Junior at Coral Shores was awarded the Monroe County Swimmer of the Year award. Corley Smith, one of his former swimmers who

graduated from Coral Shores last year and went on to attend Harvey Mudd College in California, placed top three in two of her swim events at her conference championship in her freshman year, and qualified for the NCAA championships. Carolyn mentioned that having a 5-time Olympic Medalist and 4-time Olympic Gold Medalist in Coach Jon Olsen is something everyone can be very proud of, and thanked Jon for his world class training and knowledge. Jon mentioned that he is fortunate to be a part of this community, he's seen his three children grow up and accomplish great things here and he just wants to help other kids in the community do the same. Richard Russell mentioned that Jon was the captain of the 1996 Olympic team in Atlanta, he has won a total of 27 medals in international competitions and is a former world record holder. Richard stated he is very proud and appreciative of what Jon has done for the kids at Coral Shores. Maria mentioned she's had the honor of working with Jon for 23 years, she started working at the park when Jon was first hired. She is happy to work with Jon and expressed that being able to provide these programs to such a small community is unbelievable. Jon mentioned that he's had the opportunity to travel the world and visit many different aquatic centers in his career and emphasized that what we have here in Islamorada stands out because of what it is, where it is, how beautiful it is, and how well staff takes care of the pool. Many athletes and parents he has spoken with rave about the facility and love visiting for competition.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Long time Resident Sandi Bisceglia spoke on three topics, the first being compelling evidence of PFACs ("forever chemicals") that our children encounter, second being the school system's reversal decision recently related to the baseball field renovation approvals, and third being our taxes related to the Village and the schools. She mentioned that being an educator for over 40 years, she has seen many lifestyle precautions taken by parents and adults to avoid or lessen the modern-day living challenges of chemicals and questionable safety for kids. She stated that the latest red flag proven to have PFACs is astroturf, cited by the EPA. She stated that now we are entertaining removing the natural grass to replace it with plastic grass on the Founders Park baseball field, which means kids will grow up with years of contact with plastic grass known to have PFACs. She stated that this park was created to be a natural keys area for families and Islamorada citizens who pay for it. She is concerned because there have been no photos, drawings, or open discussions about the plan for the baseball field. She thanked the new Village Manager Robert Cole for any proactive work he can initiate with the school system to further examine the details proposed for the Founders Park baseball field. She stated that Islamorada taxpayers are paying heavily to expect only the best long-term solutions, not necessarily controversial astroturf.

Captain Ed Davidson, Chairman of the Florida Keys Citizens Coalition and former elected member of the School Board, stated that studies have shown that playing on artificial turf has resulted in a 16 percent increase in lower extremity injuries compared to natural areas. He stated that the NFL has found a 28 percent increase in non-contact lower extremity injuries, not tackling injuries. The NFL has requested to return natural grass to all fields

due to this issue. He also mentioned that turf needs to be rinsed once a week and needs to be cooled to avoid blistering kids' feet. He stated that the PFAS (“forever chemicals”) can be ingested, inhaled and absorbed dermally when using astroturf and can cause growth, learning and behavioral problems in children.

Joe Jannach mentioned that he agrees that astroturf may not be appropriate but is also concerned that the committee has not come to an agreement as far as what they want, to make a proper recommendation to the Council. John Weare stated that numerous falsehoods have again been presented to the committee regarding legislation in California and their restrictions on the use of artificial surfaces. He stated that these restrictions only apply to private lawns, not to municipal parks and athletic fields. He also stated that the data presented regarding lower extremity non-contact injuries are aggregate for all sports. It is not separated out between football, soccer and baseball. These injuries have also been reported on natural surfaces due to holes, small animals, grass overgrowing at the fence line, or sprinkler heads that fail to retract. He stated that PFAS are found everywhere, including in our food and packaging, drinks, and it is difficult to reliably determine how much intake of these chemicals comes from playing surfaces versus food and other areas.

Richard Russell stated the the school board signed an agreement in the year 2000 that included two automatic 10-year renewals, and they are now in the 4th year of the first 10-year extension between the school board and Village. He mentioned that he was in research with many different athletic directors and facilities around the country and concluded that their responses to astroturf fell into two categories, either they have turf and love it, or they could not get turf at their facility and are remiss. Carolyn suggested that this conversation be put to the side until further information is received.

INTRODUCTION - ROBERT COLE, VILLAGE MANAGER: Carolyn introduced new Village Manager Rob Cole. Rob expressed that he has been in local government for almost 30 years. He stated that Founders is top of the stack when it comes to the parks and amenities he has seen in the communities where he has served. He wanted to give an update on the baseball field plan. He stated the the Village has an interlocal agreement with the Monroe County School District that will be on the Village Council’s agenda on May 7th , but wanted to make clear that the interlocal agreement does not authorize any renovation of the field or change in current operating conditions. It is the umbrella agreement that allows the high school to continue to use the field as they always have. In addition to this, there will be a baseball licensing agreement that spells out terms and conditions for renovations of the field, what that looks like, what's included and not included, and what the operating plan is for the potentially renovated field. Before the Village comes to this agreement, there will be a public conversation that takes place where everyone will have the opportunity to express their viewpoints, then the Village Council and school board will craft the licensing agreement which will come back to the Council for review and consideration. David Epstein and Joe Jannach expressed concern that this committee was not aware that the interlocal agreement was going to be discussed on May 7th and

questioned why this information hadn't been brought to the Parks and Recreation Committee first, before going to Council. Joe expressed he would like to see the Council utilize the Parks and Recreation Committee for recommendations moving forward. Richard clarified his statement about researching other facilities by stating that they were comparing specifically multi-use fields. Rob mentioned that the agreement will be available for public viewing on the agenda for the upcoming Council meeting.

In view of the long-standing relationship between the Village and the School District on this matter, John Weare motioned that the Committee endorses to the Village Council that we renew the Interlocal Agreement. Richard seconded the motion. The motion did not pass, the Committee did not agree on a unanimous decision due to lack of knowledge of the details involved in the Interlocal Agreement. Maria stated that staff can send a link with the agreement to Committee members.

PRESENTATION – REQUEST FOR EVENT PERMIT: DARREL WALRAVEN, PRESIDENT OF ISLAND KNIGHTS CHAPTER OF THE WIDOW’S SONS OF FLORIDA, FUNDRAISER FOR FLORIDA KEYS CHILDREN’S SHELTER INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAM REPORT – HEATHER HEAD, PLANTATION KEY FITNESS:

Darrel presented the Committee with a proposal for a new small event at Founders Park during the summer. The local chapter of the Widow’s Sons is an international organization of Freemasons who enjoy riding motorcycles. This chapter is a recently re-opened chapter, and as part of what is required to regain their chapter, they must put on certain events for the community. The proposed event would be a car and motorcycle show on the morning of July 20th, 2024, on the Great Lawn. They hope to have 20-30 cars and possibly more motorcycles. The proceeds of the event will go to the Florida Keys Children’s Shelter. They will also ask the kids of the shelter to be the judges for the car show. Carolyn asked how they will charge for the event to create the revenue for the shelter. Darrel stated there will be a \$25 charge to be entered into the car or motorcycle show for judging. They will be selling merchandise as well. They will have food trucks and Islamorada Beer Company serving beer. This event should finish around 1:30pm that day. Maria stated that this event does fall within the guidelines for events at the park. This organization is a local charitable 501(c)(3) organization giving back to one of our local organizations. Carolyn stated that the Committee supports having this event in the park. John moved for the Committee to endorse the event as presented. Shannon seconded the motion, the motion passed unanimously (9-0).

PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR’S REPORT

SPECIAL EVENTS AND PROGRAM REPORT – ANNE ONSGARD:

Annie introduced new Recreation Coordinator Jayden Ware. Jay introduced himself as a Keys resident of 7 years, beginning his work in the Keys at the Florida Sea Base with Boy Scouts of America as a Dive Master and Scuba Instructor. Jay was originally the

Senior Lifeguard at the Ron Levy Aquatic Center before accepting the Recreation Coordinator position. He is an Eagle Scout and grew up in the Boy Scout program. He is currently the District Chairman for the Buccaneer District, which runs from Key Largo to Key West. He has a lot of experience working with youth and is excited to begin work with the Summer Recreation Camp at Founders Park. Jay is also a participant with the Keys Players theater club.

Annie gave a presentation of the most recently held events at Founders Park, including the Caña Flamenca concert, Buccaneer Blast Youth Sailing Regatta, Tiki Tennis Triples Tournament, Upper Keys Rotary Nautical Market, multiple Pops in the Park concerts, Pierre Bensusan Acoustic concert, Island Fest, Swim Across America Open Water Swim, and the Jon Olsen Gold Medal Invitational Youth Swim Meet. She mentioned that Anna Capps, the Head Lifeguard at the Ron Levy Aquatic Center, who is also a professional mermaid, provided mermaid entertainment for the kids at the Swim Across America event. She also swam the half mile swim in her mermaid tail. Upcoming events include the I.CARE Trash Derby and Festival on Sunday, May 5th, the July 4th event, and a Synchro Sirens Synchro Showcase and Fundraiser on May 23rd. She also mentioned that the second season of the Beats on the Bay Music Series just concluded, with much success. Bands included Kendell Marvel, Majesty of Rock – Music of Journey and Styx, and local bands at the Bay Jam event. The Spring Fest Egg Hunt was held on March 30th with around 700 participants.

Annie also mentioned that summer programs are beginning in June, including Summer Recreation Camp, Junior Tennis Camp, Synchro Splash Camp, Swim and Dive Combo camp, Swim Camp, Learn to Swim group and private lessons, a Counselor in Training program, and UK Soccer Camps.

DISCUSSION OF PARK FEES AND MILITARY ACCESS – ANNE ONSGARD:

Annie explained the different types of free and paid accesses to Founders Park, and wanted to make sure Committee members understand the access policies for the park. She also explained that about every 5 years, the fees and memberships for Founders Park are evaluated and 2018 was the last time this happened, with no changes recommended. Staff will provide the Committee with a more comprehensive report of this information for evaluation soon. Carolyn clarified that entrance fees collected at the park are put into a General Fund that is then used to support the park's expenses, but there is not a one-to-one correlation. Annie stated that it may be time for an increase in fees, but this will be decided by the Committee and staff once the comprehensive report is presented.

Annie presented that the current military access policy allows for free admission to the park and pool for active United States military personnel and disabled veterans, as well as their immediate family. Staff feels this policy probably needs to be strengthened and defined for better enforcement and finds that it should have included honorably discharged veterans as well. The term “immediate family” needs definition because it can be ambiguous. Staff is currently evaluating this information and researching what other cities and counties are doing regarding military access and will be bringing more information back to the Committee soon. Shannon mentioned from her personal

experience being in the military that there is no expectation of free access and military personnel are grateful when there is any discount.

Anne also stated that staff has implemented a Zero Tolerance for Alcohol policy. She mentioned it has become increasingly difficult to get patrons in compliance regarding no alcohol in the park, and staff is trying to bring back the family-friendly environment on the weekends. Patrons are given paperwork with this information as they enter and signage has been posted in many places throughout the park, and if someone is caught with alcohol inside the park they will be asked to leave immediately, without payment refund. Carolyn asked if law enforcement can support staff in these situations if needed. Annie said yes.

UPDATE ON FOUNDERS PARK MASTER PLAN – MARIA BAGIOTTI:

Maria mentioned that on March 12th, the Village Council directed staff to solicit proposals from qualified consultants through an RFP to provide a master plan for the park. Staff has completed this and received four bids. A staff-comprised evaluation committee will meet tomorrow morning to review all bids received and rank the best qualified consultants to help with this process. The highest ranked will be submitted to Council most likely in June and hopefully the recommendation will be approved. Once it has been approved, staff will host many public engagement meetings, surveys and workshops to collect all the data to put into the Master Plan. The Parks and Recreation Committee will also be involved in the decision making. The Master Plan will include evaluation of facilities, operations, programs, events, policies, parking, and all other aspects of the park. The staff-comprised evaluation committee consists of the Director of Planning, the Biologist, and Maria. Joe and David expressed the importance of the Parks and Recreation Committee being involved in all aspects of Founders Park's decision-making.

UPDATE ON CAPITAL PROJECTS – MARIA BAGIOTTI:

Maria mentioned that the Solar Lighting Replacement Project will soon be in the implementation stage, and the company that will be installing the lighting has been chosen. The project will start within the next three months once all the equipment and supplies are ordered and delivered. Shannon asked if the installation would have any impact on parking. Maria said the project would be done in sections and should have minimal impact on the park and parking areas.

She also presented on the Founders Park Beach Inclusive Playground Replacement Project. The new equipment to be installed will be ADA compliant and inclusive. There will be two separate areas, one for 2–5-year-old children, and another for 6–12-year-old children. In the upcoming Council meeting on May 7th, the contractor chosen for this project will be brought to the Council for approval. An application for TDC grant money has been submitted as well. Natasha asked if there has been any consideration to enclose the playground area with fencing. She has a friend with a special needs child who finds it difficult to use the playground because it is not confined and can be unsafe due to it being so close to the water on the beach. Maria said that is a very good idea and will be considered. John suggested that after the new playground area is complete, there could

possibly be a closed period where the equipment could be sprayed down with a pressure washer or something similar, for longevity purposes.

Maria then presented on the Splash Pad Resurfacing project. She said the vendor for the project was selected to replace the old surface with a new rubber slip-resistant surface. This project should begin within the next month or two and is 100% funded by a TDC grant. Maria also stated that the consultant service was chosen for the Ron Levy Aquatic Center Facility Renovation Project and is helping create the scope of work to include civil and structural design plans. This project not only includes the resurfacing of the pool but also upgrades to mechanical equipment, locker rooms, lifeguard office, break room and first aid area, and cost analysis. This will be the largest project that will take place at this park since it was established. This will be a very long major project and implementation will most likely be in September or October of 2025.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION: Joe suggested having a meeting soon just for the Committee Discussion, as he feels there is a lot of information that still needs to be discussed. Maria mentioned that if any Committee member has something they would like to talk about in meetings, to please let staff know and it will be put on the upcoming agenda.

FUTURE ITEMS: Committee Discussion meeting date.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman set the next meeting date as TBD. Carolyn made a motion to adjourn, Joe Jannach seconded. The meeting ended at 6:06 P.M.

Recording Secretary,

Alicia Mote

Minutes Approved by Committee on
Chairwoman Carolyn Wightman _____.